Leadership and Personal Ethics

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Fall 2013 2 Credits

8AM – 12 Noon

The class meets on Saturdays: September 7 (Tilford 117), September 21 (Tilford 117), October 5 (Jepson 126), October 19 (Jepson 126), October 26 (Tilford 117)

NOTE THE ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FIRST MEETING UNDER “ASSIGNMENTS” BELOW

Booklist


Background Reading

If you would like to strengthen your background knowledge of the material we study, the following works should be of benefit: Long Walk to Freedom, Nelson Mandela; The Heart of Buddha’s Teaching, Thich Nhat Hanh; The Enchiridion, Epictetus; The Confessions, Augustine

General Description of the Course’s Content

The personal ethics of a leader determine not only the moral character of the leader as an individual, but also influence the ethical character of the organization and those with whom it interacts. Moral character is, of course, a consequence of personal moral decision-making. But moral character has an influence on others in many ways, including influence on the values others choose out of emulation of those shown by leadership.

This course focuses on personal moral character by examining desire and discipline from several points of view. We begin with a discussion of Leo Tolstoy’s short stories, move into a detailed discussion of Irvine’s On Desire (sessions two and three), and conclude with an examination of reflections on desire and discipline from the Dalai Lama (session four) and Nelson Mandela (session five). The goal is to arrive at a useful and theoretically rich notion of the role of desire and discipline in good personal character as well as in good leadership.

The Course’s Anticipated Outcomes

The primary outcome of the course is a thorough understanding of each of the four author’s perspectives on personal moral character in general and specifically on desire and discipline. There is a remarkable coincidence of agreement among the authors in regard to desire and discipline, as well as an enriching diversity in their points of view. The secondary outcome is an appreciation of how desire and discipline are involved with good leadership. The third anticipated outcome is an exhibition of proper analysis, criticism, and communication of ideas involving moral values, with an emphasis on desire and discipline.
How the Course Reaches its Anticipated Outcomes

We read, reflect, and discuss each of the texts in the course (Tolstoy, Irvine, Dali Lama, Stengel). Each student is assigned one or more chapters in each book (with the exception of Tolstoy – see “class assignments” below) to summarize and critique every meeting. The summaries should clarify main ideas about desire and discipline in the reading as well as clarify any allusions to leadership in the text that would assist us in our discussions. The critique should provide specific and meaningful insights into the material. The goal of the critique is not to simply provide an opinion about the quality of the text, but to bring out the student’s insights into the value of the text in regard to understanding desire and improving discipline. Keep in mind that we are all attempting to improve our moral character both as individuals and as leaders. Our discussions delve into each text in detail, and this is accomplished by your work in your summaries/critiques. Take into consideration that our time is limited in class, so your summary/critique needs to be appropriate in length as well as content.

Your final paper satisfies the primary outcome of the course. It should demonstrate that you have a thorough appreciation of each book, and that you can explain your own perspective on the role of desire and discipline in one’s personal life as well as in good leadership.

Class Assignments

The First Meeting
Please read all three short stories in the Tolstoy volume (“How Much Land does a Man Need?”, “The Death of Ivan Ilych,” and “The Kreutzer Sonata”). Please prepare for the discussion by jotting down some notes for yourself on a variety of ways Tolstoy depicts desire and discipline in each story. Note how different desires and disciplines (and lack of disciplines and desires) are depicted in each story. Finally, prepare to share your assessments of Tolstoy’s depictions; which do you find insightful, which do you feel he misses the mark with, and which do you want to investigate more?

Summaries/Critiques
Each week (except for the first week), every student is responsible for a summary and critique of an assigned page range in the reading assignment. The assignments are made the week prior to the week they are due. The summary/critiques are required to be written and turned in during or immediately after the session. You will present your summary/critique orally; ideally you should be able to read your summary/critique to us. You should also contribute substantive comments in the discussion that revolves around the summary/critiques of other students. These assignments – including your discussion contributions, written work, and oral presentation - are weighted 50% of your final grade.

Final Paper
A successful final paper describes the main focus of each of the four books regarding desire and discipline. It concludes with a discussion of your insights into the role of desire and discipline in personal character as well as good leadership. The paper should describe what you have learned from each text and how what you have learned applies to moral character and good leadership. The paper is fifteen to eighteen pages in length (APA). The final paper is due to the email address on this syllabus by November 9, attached as a Word document. The final paper is weighted 50% of your final grade. Please do not ask for an “extension;” make sure that the final paper is sent on time, to be received by November 9.